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DELIVERED TO THE GRADUATES IN MEDICINE AT THE ANNUAL
CONVOCAION OF THE MEDICAL FACULTY OF MCGILL
UNIVERSITY, APRIL 2ND, 1897.

BY

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Professor of Laryngology, McGill University; Laryngologist, Montreal General
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GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS:

For the past four years it has been the duty of the Members of the Faculty to lecture to you within the College walls of the University, and in the theatres of the hospitals, but to-day such duties cease, and the relation of pupil and teacher no longer exists; we are *confrères* and to me has been delegated the privilege of congratulating you upon your preferment, and of welcoming you to the ranks of an honourable profession.

Your progress during the past four years has been our earnest care, and no effort has been spared to fit you for the responsibilities which, from this day forth, you are yourselves to assume. You have been brought to the goal of your first ambition, and it now remains for each of you to determine your future career.

There is much to be borne and much that is wearisome in the conditions of life upon which you are about to enter. The weight of the burden can be lightened by the view you may take of the work. Do not look to your profession as a mere source of pecuniary gain and personal preferment, for it offers you the highest opportunities for the advancement of your intellectual powers, the promotion of social good and the alleviation of physical woes of suffering mankind. By concentrating every faculty to the careful fulfilment of such work, the

dull prosaic side of life will be lightened by a consciousness of a noble duty effectually accomplished, which will throw around your ordinary duties a halo, and relieve the tedium of your solitary hours. Those men who have entered upon the study of medicine from love of it, make the best students and doctors,—the physician to be successful must think his profession the finest in the world.

Our profession is an arduous, yet fascinating one. Our responsibilities are great. "We are trusted as no other men are. By the force of circumstances, as well as by the relations of mutual confidence which grow up between the patient and his medical adviser, enormous power for good or evil lies within our hands, and on our discretion depends frequently the happiness and well-being of families." You are to become the trusted friend of the family, and whatever is entrusted to your care must be regarded as sacred; a breach of such trust will mark you as unworthy of the profession. Therefore do not make the ailments of any patient or their private affairs a topic wherewith to entertain others whilst making your daily rounds. There is no more objectionable individual than a gossiping doctor.

The question at the outset which undoubtedly has occurred to each of you is, "What am I going to do"? To some of you are open positions as house-surgeons in the hospitals, either in this city or elsewhere, and I would strongly urge the seeking of such positions. Once installed, you will find opportunities unexcelled of more properly fitting you for the great responsibilities of your calling. Here your mind will be trained to be observant, careful and exact in noting the details of cases under your direct charge.

The benefit of this cannot be overestimated, and it will stand you in good stead when out in general practice. Many a prominent physician and surgeon of the day owes his position to the proper use made of the opportunities afforded him in his capacity as house-physician and surgeon.

Others of you must be satisfied with the opportunities afforded of starting into general practice at once; unless under exceptional circumstances, it will be impossible for such to be fully occupied from the start. In this way the time at your disposal will at first be considerable, and you will form habits during this critical period which will leave their impress on your future life. Indolent and careless habits so easily grow upon one, that they have marred many a promising career, while habits of research and thoroughness, coupled with a love of the profession, are sure not only to lead to success but to greatly facilitate your future work. If you have few cases, let them

be carefully studied, and do not put away your text books with the parchment you have received to-day.

Some of you may anticipate a trip abroad to visit the various hospitals of Great Britain and the Continent. Just a word on this subject. You are as yet inexperienced, the advantages of such a trip cannot at present be fully appreciated, as you are not in a position to sift the chaff from the wheat. The result is a lot of valuable time wasted and money spent to no advantage.

After four or five years work in general practice, or after holding a hospital appointment as resident for a year or so, you are then in a position from the experience acquired to spend a couple of years very profitably abroad.

Unfortunately however there are cases amongst the graduating class of each year which necessitate some to cross the Atlantic and obtain further degrees to enable them to become registered practitioners of certain Provinces of the Dominion. This state of things is a deplorable one, and let us hope the day is not far distant when one license will give the profession the privilege of practising anywhere in Her Majesty's Dominions.

That any one should cross the Atlantic simply with the idea that having acquired further degrees he is therefore entitled to be more deserving of practice is a delusion; the laity looks to the personal ability of the practitioner and not to any additional degrees he may have secured.

A danger which confronts us in the present time is the ambition of the recent graduate in medicine to take up a speciality, and how often one is asked by the newly created M.D., "What speciality might I take up?"

Specialism is not a branch of medicine separated by a definite line of demarcation, independent of and quite distinct from the field of general practice, but should be regarded as supplementary to this. A field open to the general practitioner who, in his riper experience, will add to his store of knowledge by such further researches in the region of science as will enable him to deal in a skilful manner with diseases of certain organs which require specific treatment. The specialist is thus a co-worker with the general practitioner, not an antagonist striving for his own selfish aims, but working harmoniously to their mutual advantage. The recent graduate who imagines that all that is necessary to qualify as a specialist is to spend a few months abroad, or, as some do, a few weeks, attending the clinics of hospitals not far from home, makes as ad mistake. To these short-term specialists is attributable much of the harm done to specialism. They bring

discredit upon themselves and court the displeasure of the general practitioner. With no foundation of general practice, and a brazened knowledge of the speciality they profess to have studied, they launch out, and I can hardly find words forcible enough to denounce their miserable attempts at treatment in which they more often fail than succeed. Men of one idea, and that too often warped by interest, they ascribe to causes for which their speciality has the remedies, all the ills that human flesh is heir to. Then follow the usual results, diagnosis wrongly formed, treatment misdirected, damage irreparably done and the lives of many rendered miserable; but "When thoroughly grounded in the principles and practice of your profession, and having acquired experience from some years of practical work, it will then be time enough to turn particular attention to some one branch of it. I do not wish to discourage you, if your taste and talent so incline you, from acquiring knowledge and skill in one particular line, for the range of work has become so enlarged that it is impossible for one to perfect himself in all its various branches. So, if in time you find you possess a particular skill in some certain line of work, and your skill receives such acknowledgment from your fellows as to justify you in relinquishing general work for a specific line of action, then I consider you would be quite justified in confining yourself to that special work." (Dr. H. Kelly.)

Determined then to practice some special branch of medicine, let it be after considerable experience in general practice, and after at least two years abroad, studying hard and honestly in special hospitals. No one can acquire a solid foundation in any speciality in less time, for if the foundation be weak the whole super-structure must necessarily be defective.

Enter your new field with a broad mind, determined to investigate and treat local trouble as generally dependent upon a manifestation of disorganisation of the whole system, and not as symptoms to be viewed and treated only through the means of the speculum, laryngoscope and ophthalmoscope. Then when fully and properly qualified, you will be esteemed by your brother specialists and win the confidence of the general practitioner.

As a practitioner either in the country or the city, let your moments of leisure be occupied in reading as much as possible the current medical literature, in attending meetings of the medical societies, and indulging in some form of profitable recreation. Contribute your share, however small in the advancement of medicine and surgery, by reporting your cases, either before the medical societies, or in reput-

able medical journals. Your work may be criticised, but do not let that discourage you, but rather incite you to better things.

Seek opportunities to visit your Alma Mater, and the various hospitals where you will, and to come in contact with men of experience in the professional world. The interchange of ideas will tend to broaden your mind and will keep you from falling into a hum-drum way of doing your work. Medicine is a progressive science, and to be successful practitioners, you must keep abreast of the times. To those of your *confrères* who are in good standing, be ever ready to extend the hand of good fellowship. Be considerate of their errors of diagnosis, and do not seek to make capital out of it to suit your own ends. When attending cases which present unusual symptoms, and which baffle your skill, do not hesitate to seek further advice, it will lessen your responsibility and will be of benefit to the patient. This will not in anyway depreciate your standing in his eyes, but will rather strengthen your position.

In all your actions be manly and straightforward.

"To thine own self be true,
 "And it must follow as the night the day
 "Thou can'st not then be false to any man."

Let not those of you who are the first in the class think that your qualifications are greater than those who have been less fortunate, or that your gifts entitle you to greater success in after life than the rest. It is not always the most brilliant student who makes the most successful practitioner. The so-called "plodding" and slow student often has qualities hidden through the pressure of studies during his college course, which will shine only when opportunities present themselves, and often enable him to outstrip his more brilliant college friend. But whatever has been the success of each of you, let me caution you against making an improper use of such qualifications.

Do not think that with the closing of to-day's functions our interest in your welfare ceases; it goes forth with you as you leave this hall, and ever will continue through your career.

Do not let the knowledge you have acquired within the prescribed time of the college course lead you to imagine that you have exhausted the science of medicine. There is no greater stumbling block on the road to learning than self-satisfaction. Strive therefore to increase the store of knowledge you now have, by continuous study and practical work, and your labour will not be in vain.

You may congratulate yourselves upon graduating at this present period in the history of medicine and surgery, for no era has been marked by greater progress and advancement. Look into the field of

surgery, and see what brilliant results have been accomplished by the skilful surgeon, how through his efforts many obscure diseases of the hidden organs of the body have been made clear and operations successfully performed which have been the means of saving many lives, in cases, which only a few years ago, would have been regarded as hopeless.

Consider the physician of the present day and how infinitely superior are his methods of diagnosing and treating diseases than those formerly accepted. Think what opportunities have been afforded you by the more recent advances of medicine, such as the certainty of recognising tuberculosis in its incipient stage, of treating malaria more intelligently, and of having methods (so recently elaborated by one of your teachers) at your disposal, of diagnosing typhoid fever in its earliest stages. It is owing to the untiring work of the bacteriologist that we have placed in our hands such means of so successfully treating our cases.

What grander work of the last two years has been accomplished than that of the bacteriologist in giving to us a means wherewith to battle more effectually than ever against a disease so dreaded and so awful in its results as diphtheria. The introduction of antitoxin therefore makes another mark in the progress of medicine.

It is our privilege and yours to reap the benefit of and to carry on the grand work accomplished by the many faithful workers in the field of medicine and surgery, and to apply their results, now no longer on their trial, but proved and accepted, to the welfare of patients entrusted to our care. Be not contented to rest here upon the labour of others; strive by your own endeavours to further the advance of science, and in doing so pursue your researches, in that field for which by your inclinations and qualifications you are best suited.

In conclusion, Gentlemen, I would ask you to remember always the nobility of your profession and let your just appreciation of its high standard be demonstrated in the honesty and faithfulness of your work. Consider the benevolence of its aim, the elevating character of its studies, in the pursuit of which all the best faculties of our nature are called into action. Let it be your ambition to excel in it, fearlessly encountering the difficulties it presents. Strengthen yourselves both mentally and morally by the discipline it affords in patient and sustained labour, and press forward in your new career with all diligence, not with a vain-glorious spirit, aspiring to out-do your fellows, but rather with a desire to bring honour upon your profession.

Let your work be honest and it cannot escape reward. Knowledge is power. Therefore embrace every opportunity of enlarging your mind, not only to gratify your own literary or scientific tastes, but to benefit mankind.

Let me on behalf of your *confrères* and in the name of the University, wish you a happy and prosperous career, and may health wait on you in carrying out the duties with which you have this day been entrusted.